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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In application of: **SHOJI, Nobuhiro et al.** Group Art Unit: **3622**

Serial No.: **09/754,086** Examiner: **Khanh H. LE**

Filed: **January 5, 2001** **P.T.O. Confirmation No.: 4704**

For. **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR EXCHANGE POINTS**

CLAIM FOR PRIORITY UNDER 35 U.S.C. 119

Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Date: August 31, 2004

Sir:

The benefit of the filing date of the following prior foreign application is hereby requested for the above-identified application, and the priority provided in 35 U.S.C. 119 is hereby claimed:

Japanese Appln. No. 2000-254965, filed August 25, 2000

In support of this claim, the requisite certified copy of said original foreign application is filed herewith.

It is requested that the file of this application be marked to indicate that the applicants have complied with the requirements of 35 U.S.C. 119 and that the Patent and Trademark Office kindly acknowledge receipt of said certified copy.

In the event that any fees are due in connection with this paper, please charge our Deposit Account No. 01-2340.

Respectfully submitted,

ARMSTRONG, KRATZ, QUINTOS,
HANSON & BROOKS, LLP

Darren R. Crew

Darren R. Crew
Attorney for Applicants
Reg. No. 37,806

DRC/llf
Atty. Docket No. **001763**
Suite 1000
1725 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 659-2930

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PATENT TRADEMARK OFFICE

日本国特許庁
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This is to certify that the annexed is a true copy of the following application as filed with this Office.

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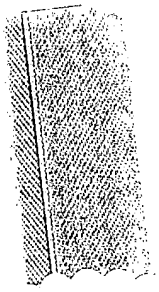
出願人
Applicant(s): 株式会社ピーサイト



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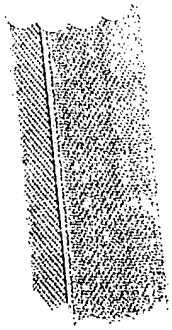

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【発明者】
　【住所又は居所】　東京都中央区日本橋人形町１丁目２番７号　株式会社ピーサイト・ドット・コム内
　【氏名】　小路　伸弘
【発明者】
　【住所又は居所】　東京都新宿区西新宿６丁目１２番１号　インターネットナンバー株式会社内
　【氏名】　白根　久也
【発明者】
　【住所又は居所】　東京都中央区日本橋人形町１丁目２番７号　株式会社ピーサイト・ドット・コム内
　【氏名】　羽中田　哲雄
【特許出願人】
　【住所又は居所】　東京都中央区日本橋人形町１丁目２番７号
　【氏名又は名称】　株式会社ピーサイト・ドット・コム
【代理人】
　【識別番号】　100081411
　【弁理士】
　【氏名又は名称】　三澤　正義
　【電話番号】　03-3361-8668
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【書類名】　外国語明細書

CLAIMS

1. A method for at least one consumer to exchange points issued by various sources comprising the steps of:

accessing a first server,

displaying an exchange rate of points between said consumer's points and at least one other form of points,

allowing said consumer to select which points they wish to convert said consumer's points into of any points available by use of said first server,

allowing said consumer to inform said first server of said consumer's decision to convert said consumer's points to said points available,

allowing said consumer to input any identifying information that consumer uses said consumer's points,

allowing said consumer to provide information that said consumer wishes to use as identifying information in relation to said points available,

converting said points of said consumer to points that said available points based on said exchange rate, and

providing said consumer with said available points.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of converting further comprises:

forming a communication link between said first server and a second server which issued said consumer's points,

forming a communication link between said first server and a third server which issued or can issue points which said consumer seeks,

communicating to second server said identifying information of said points,

allowing said second server to assign ownership of said consumer points to said first server,

communicating from said first server to said third server a request to assign said sought points for use in relation to said third server,

communicating from said first server to said third server a request to record said new identifying information in assigning said available points, and

receiving from said third server confirmation that said available points have been assigned in the event that assignment is successfully carried out.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein points comprise points purchased using a credit card.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein points comprise mileage.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein points comprise units for payment of pre-paid access to network sites.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein said accessing step is conducted via a network.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein said accessing step is conducted via the Internet.
8. The method of claim 1, wherein further comprising the steps of:

providing points with time limitations on their use and

erasing information of ownership of said points with time limitations

upon expiration of said time limitation.

9. A system for exchanging points comprising:

at least one server from which a point transaction can occur which is connected to a communication network said one server having access to a memory,

at least one second server capable of use in issuing, recording and communicating information on consumer's points said second server having access to a second memory,

at least one third server capable of use in issuing, recording and communicating information on said consumer's points said third server having access to a third memory,

at least one terminal computer connected to a communication network and capable of sending and receiving information,

wherein a communication link is formed between said terminal computer and said first server, said terminal computer can be used to input information on said consumer points, said first server in response indicates the kinds and amounts of points available to consumer, consumer can then indicate which points they wish to convert their points to and provide information for use in identifying said consumer points as being those of said consumer, said first server then forming a communication link with and communicating with said second server and said third server to exchange said consumer points to issued points of said third server.

10. The system of claim 9 further comprising:

said first memory comprising at least one database to and from which

points issuance related information can be recorded and retrieved for said one server,

said second memory comprising at least one second database to and from which points issuance related information can be recorded and retrieved for said second server, and

said third memory comprising at least one third database to and from which points issuance related information can be recorded and retrieved for said third server

wherein communication links between each respective database and each respective server are utilized to confirm, assign and record said consumer points as required to exchange points.

11. The system of claim 9 further comprising:

at least one database at which points are stored in the form of mileage.

12. The system of claim 9 further comprising:

at least one server which assists in issuing of points in exchange for payment by credit card.

13. The system of claim 9 further comprising:

at least one server and at least one database which issue points with time limitation on their use and ownership of said points with time limitations is erased upon expiration of said time limitation.

14 The system of claim 9 further comprising:

at least one server and at least one database which can issue points of different classes and different names.

A METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR ALLOWING CONSUMERS TO EXCHANGE POINTS

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to electronic commerce, and, more particularly, to a method and system for allowing customers to exchange points issued for use in electronic commerce or other uses.

BACKGROUND ART

The Internet has allowed consumers to directly access information on companies and their products, in addition to transacting purchases using credit cards and other means. Companies with websites or which advertise on the websites of others appreciate that the Internet therefore presents a great opportunity to market to Internet users and make sales on-line. The distribution of coupons is a key component in such marketing plans. The ability of a company to attract consumers by distributing coupons and deliver other rewards systems is an essential competitive aspect that companies must master to succeed in Internet commerce.

To date, it has been difficult for point service consumers to convert their points from one company's points to those of another company. "Points" are units which can be used to purchase goods, obtain services, earn prizes of various kinds in addition to many other uses. Said points are similar in effect to coupons, vouchers, gift certificates or similar payment related mechanisms and are often used in customer reward or incentive systems. Consumers wishing to make purchases or payments to many sites

could buy electronic money to use in paying for services via the Internet at a number of sites, however, this is not the same as points in that electronic money would have to be purchased by the consumer from an electronic money provider to be used. Alternatively, credit card payments can be made by consumers however, this too would involve payment from said consumer. Rather than buying electronic money, customers often prefer to receive coupon type discounts that make products and services cheaper, said discounts costing the consumer nothing to obtain. Consumers' desire to exchange points is not addressed by services to date however.

A problem by company site operators is the acquisition of information about what consumers wish to buy that said company does not offer.

The present invention addresses these and other problems.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

This invention relates to a method and system for allowing consumers to exchange points issued to them by companies. More particularly, the present invention allows the user to convert their points from those issued by one company to points which can be used in making purchases from another company.

Points can be issued to consumers for use on a network system such as the internet. Such points are often issued to encourage the consumer to make a purchase from their company or for many other possible reasons. The present invention allows consumers who have received such points to convert said points to the points used by another company. This is carried out by converting the points at a set point conversion rate to an intermediate

point value which is then converted at a set point conversion rate to the points ultimately sought by the consumer holding points originally.

A further benefit of the present invention is that the point provider can request that a time limit be set for the use of certain points issued to the consumer. The company can therefore use this function to allocate the amount of points that they wish used for a particular period, such as summer clothing sales, and thereby prevent the points from being used in buying clothes in the fall. This overcomes the difficulties that companies face in not only setting an advertising budget for a particular time period but also the difficulty in trying to target a certain group of customers depending on the season without having consumers from a prior season whom may comprise a different target group affect the results.

A further benefit of the present invention to companies is that where they agree to allow their points to be converted to points issued by other companies and said other company agrees to accept such conversion, the point exchange server can report to the company initially issuing the points, what points the consumer converted said points into. Thereby, the company initially issuing the points can use such report to consider offering new services so that a consumer will spend all of the issued points on buying products of the point issuing company, not another company. In other words, information on consumer needs can be received and acted on by a company issuing points.

Embodiments of the present invention are directed to a method and system for allowing consumers to convert the points that they have accrued

to points which can be used in transactions with other companies.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is schematic view showing an embodiment of the invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The preferred embodiment of the present invention is carried out as appears in Figure 1. Figure 1 includes a terminal computer 101, server 102, an associated database 102a to server 102, server 103, associated database 103a of server 103, server 104 and associated database 104a of server 104.

Terminal computer 101 could be any computer which possesses Internet related capabilities, such as an iMac, IBM compatible desktop or laptop computer, palm computer, cell phone or similar computer. Servers 102, 103 and 104 can be commercial servers such as those made by Sun Microsystems or other servers for use in providing Internet related services such as hosting interactive web pages and other Internet services. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, databases 102a, 103a and 104a can be commercial databases located in separate servers from servers 102, 103 and 104 capable of connection with and use by Internet servers in sending, receiving and recording information. Databases 102a, 103a and 104a can also be contained in servers 102, 103 and 104.

Consumers use terminal computer 101 to form a communication link with server 103, server 103 being capable of performing point exchange. Consumer either inputs into a communication box the type of points that they possess and may wish to convert or selects from the displayed information what kind of points for which they wish to see the point

conversion rate. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, consumer may input various kinds of points which may have set time limits for use or special naming for different classes of points offered in relation to transactions with the same company. In the case of input, terminal computer 101 communicates to server 103, the input data. Server 103 responds by providing the exchange rate for such points to other points and allows consumer to input the number of points that they wish to convert and identification information relating to their ownership of such points as needed. Server 103 is equipped to be able to form communication links with other servers 102 and 104. For purposes of the present invention, other servers 102 and 104 are those, which belong to point issuing companies. Server 103 then forms a communication link with server 102 and communicates a query requesting confirmation of ownership of points input by consumer from terminal 101. Server 102 then communicates with database 102a to confirm the ownership of points and assign ownership to the company at server 103. In the event of points being confirmed as belonging to consumer according to identification information received from server 103, ownership of points is recorded as belonging to server 103 and server 102 communicates to server 103 information necessary for server 103 to utilize such points. Server 103 then communicates with database 103a information necessary for server 103 to make use of points. Server 103 also communicates to database 103a that consumer is now the owner of points administered by server 103, the amount or number of points having been calculated by server 103 based upon exchange rate previously shown to

consumer. Server 103 then forms a communication link with server 104. Server 103 then communicates a request to server 104 to acquire a set amount or number of points from server 104, number being the result of calculation by server 103. Server 104 then communicates to database 104a to confirm that points are available in the sought amount and, if so, indicates to server 104 that points are available. Server 104 then communicates a request to server 103 that identifying information be selected by consumer for use of points of server 104. Server 103 then communicates to terminal 101 a request for selecting identifying information and allows consumer to input from terminal 101 identifying information selected. Server 103 then relays information to server 104. Server 104 then records into database 104a identifying information and assigns amount or number of points to consumer. Upon completion of assignment of points of server 104, server 103 then communicates to database 103a that assignment of points of server 103 to consumer should be erased. Server 103 then communicates information to terminal 101 confirming consumer's ownership of points of server 104 and loss of ownership of points of server 102.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, consumer may provide identifying information to be used in relation to points sought of server 104 as a part of their initial request for conversion of points of server 102 to points of server 104.

Also, in the preferred embodiment of the present invention, point issuing servers such as server 102 and server 104 can be set to have no limit on the number of points that they will recognize from another site, thereby

obviating the step of confirming whether sufficient points are available from the issuing server of the points sought.

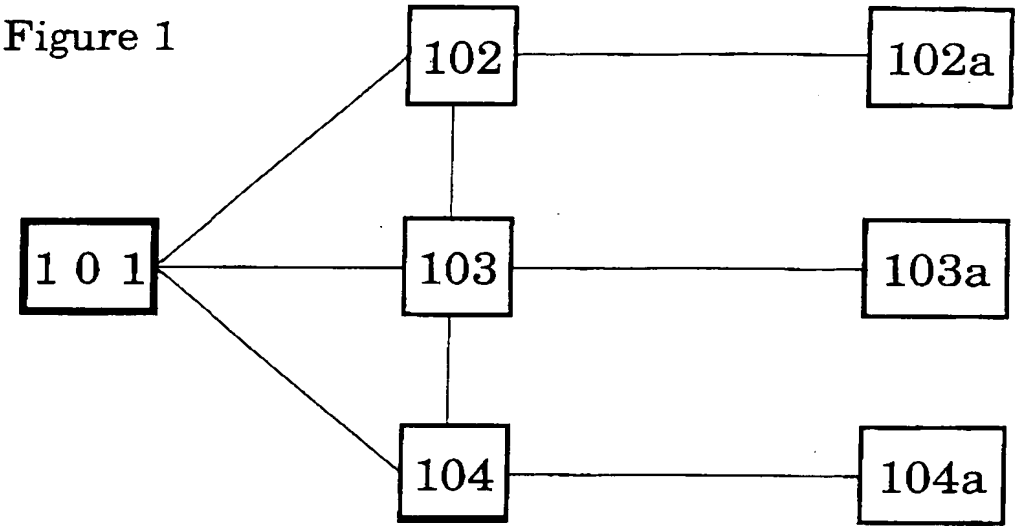
The present invention may also be used to convert issued points belonging to the consumer to points of the converting server, server 103 to be kept in an account for future conversion into other points or for use at the site hosted by server 103 or related sites which recognize the points of server 103. As indicated above, point issuing servers can have their points customized into different names, categories, and validity time-spans of points as well as other similar designations which will then appear in such form on server 103. In the event that points of a set time limit are converted to points of server 103, the points of server 103 may be set to have a time limit as well.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

According to the present invention consumers can exchange points for use with companies other than said points' issuing company or said points' designated company by means of a communication network. Companies which agree to allow their points to be converted to other points may also use the present invention to allow their point recipients to convert points with minimal effort on the part of the company issuing the points. Said companies may also use the present invention to obtain information on their clients needs.

【書類名】　外国語図面

Figure 1



【書類名】 外国語要約書

ABSTRACT

A system and method making use of a network to exchange points issued by various companies. Preferably the points included would include points for prepaid Internet use of certain websites, mileage from frequent flier programs, coupon type points, points issued by stores to customers and numerous other types of points. This invention makes use of a network to allow consumers to exchange their points issued by one source for use at a minimum of one website for points issued by and for use at a minimum of at least one other website, following reviewing the exchange rates set between the two kinds of issued points. The site at which this exchange transaction takes place has a database of its own as would both issuing sites make use of databases to monitor the proper holder of or verify the value of various issued points. Points are then transferred at rates set by the exchange transaction site according to agreements reached with the issuing companies. Customers are then enabled to use the points that they acquire by exchange.

特願２０００－２５４９６５

出　願　人　履　歴　情　報

識別番号　［５００４０００７６］

１．変更年月日　２０００年　８月２５日
［変更理由］　新規登録
住　所　東京都中央区日本橋人形町１丁目２番７号
氏　名　株式会社ピーサイト・ドット・コム

２．変更年月日　２００１年　４月　４日
［変更理由］　名称変更
住　所　東京都中央区日本橋人形町１丁目２番７号
氏　名　株式会社ピーサイト

３．変更年月日　２００４年　７月２８日
［変更理由］　住所変更
住　所　東京都中野区本町４丁目３８番１８号
氏　名　株式会社ピーサイト